

## ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** April 10, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Region 6 Bighorn Sheep Exclusion Zone

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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### **Background**

An applied bighorn sheep management strategy is to maintain wide separation between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats where possible. Region 6 has healthy bighorn populations in the Missouri River Breaks in hunting districts 622 and 680, and also a small bighorn sheep population in the Little Rockies (HD 620), an island mountain range close to the Missouri River Breaks. While there are currently no domestic sheep near occupied wild sheep habitat, there have been several instances where bighorn sheep, typically young rams, have wandered north well outside of defined bighorn sheep habitat and within the vicinity of domestic sheep herds. To prevent the possibility of commingling and disease transmission between wild and domestic sheep, FWP is proposing to establish a "Bighorn Sheep Exclusion Zone" which would encompass land well outside of bighorn sheep habitat and in areas domestic sheep are known to occur. Wild sheep that wonder into the exclusion zone could be dispatched by FWP to prevent the possibility of commingling and disease transmission from domestic herds to existing wild bighorn populations. The area encompassed by this exclusion zone would be all lands outside of bighorn sheep HD 680 and deer/elk HDs 621, 622, 631 and 632. In unique circumstances, FWP may authorize a landowner to dispatch a bighorn sheep in this exclusion zone when FWP isn't able to immediately respond. Based on experience, only small numbers of bighorn sheep in isolated circumstances would be lethally removed.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

To date there has been no formal public comment period associated with this action; however, this proposal has been vetted through the Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council. Region 6 has also discussed this action with individual landowners and sportsmen. There is high concern over the welfare of bighorn sheep populations in the Missouri River Breaks. If approved, this proposal would move forward for public comment thru 5 p.m., Monday, May 19. Any final adoption would take place at the June 12 Commission meeting.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Alternatives include continuing to rely on a kill permit or some other separate authorization for taking bighorn sheep in this area. However, the time factor in getting such approval on a case by case basis risks not being able to relocate the wild sheep before it moves back into bighorn sheep habitat.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission endorse approving the Region 6 Bighorn Sheep Exclusion Zone, which would allow FWP to dispatch bighorn sheep when observed within this given area to reduce the possibility of commingling and disease transmission between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve the Region 6 Bighorn Sheep Exclusion Zone proposal for public comment.